

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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E.O. 11652: N/A
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SUBJECT: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN

REF: GEORGETOWN 1679

1. THE CAMPAIGN OVER THE NATIONAL REFERENDUM TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION WAS RELATIVELY UNEVENTFUL DURING THE PAST WEEK. THE ONLY DEMONSTRATION WAS A 2,000 PERSON MARCH AND PRAYER SERVICE FOR PEACE IN GUYANA, SPONSORED BY THE GUYANA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, WHICH IS OPPOSED TO A NEW CONSTITUTION. THE MARCH AND SERVICE WERE CONDUCTED WITHOUT INCIDENT.

2. THE GOVERNMENT OF GUYANA'S (GOG) STRATEGY SEEMS TO BE THREE-FOLD. ONE, THEY ARE CONTINUING AN OFFENSIVE IN THE GOVERNMENT-OWNED PRESS AGAINST THE INTEGRITY OF OPPOSITION GROUPS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE MAY 28 EDITION OF THE NEW NATION, THE NEWSPAPER OF THE RULING PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONGRESS (PNC) PARTY, PRINTED THREE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR HIGHLY CRITICAL OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. (ONE LETTER URGED THAT
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PRIESTS SHOULD BE IMPRISONED AND THE KEYS THROWN AWAY.) TWO, THE GOG IS TRYING TO ASSURE THE PEOPLE THAT UNDER THE NEW CONSTITUTION FOR THE TRANSITION TO SOCIALISM, FUNDAMENTAL LIBERTIES AND DEMOCRACY WILL BE PRESERVED. (DETAILS OF PNC ROUGH DRAFT OF NEW CONSTITUTION BY SEPTTEL.) AS PART OF THIS APPROACH, THE PNC IS CONDUCTING A SERIES OF "PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENTS" IN VARIOUS TOWNS WHERE PEOPLE CAN

DISCUSS CURRENT ISSUES. FOR ONE SESSION IN LINDEN ON MAY 31, THE PNC INVITED SEVERAL SPOKESMEN FROM THE OPPOSITION TO THE REFERENDUM AND PROPOSED A DEBATE. THE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES DECLINED TO ATTEND; WE DO NOT YET KNOW IF OTHER OPPOSITION GROUPS WERE PRESENT. THREE, THE GOG, IN CONFORMITY WITH ITS RECENT GUIDELINES TO JOURNALISTS (REFTEL), IS GIVING ALMOST NO PUBLICITY IN GOVERNMENT-OWNED NEWSPAPERS TO THE ACTIVITIES OF GROUPS IN OPPOSITION TO A NEW CONSTITUTION. IN ADDITION, THE TWO RADIO STATIONS IN GUYANA ARE NOT ALLOWING OPPOSITION GROUPS TO PAY FOR BROADCAST OF PROGRAMS THAT DISCUSS THE MERITS OF A NEW CONSTITUTION. THIS POLICY, ACCORDING TO THE GENERAL MANAGER OF PRIVATELY-OWNED RADIO DEMARARA, WAS ADOPTED TO CONFORM WITH PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM'S ANNOUNCEMENT ON MAY 13 THAT THE GOG WILL NOT ALLOW PAID ADVERTISEMENTS ON THE SUBJECT OF THE CONSTITUTION. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, SPECIFICALLY, WAS FORBIDDEN TO BROADCAST A PRE-RECORDED PROGRAM ON THE REFERENDUM.

3. COMMENT: THE RELATIVE TRANQUILITY IN GEORGETOWN DURING THE PAST WEEK IS SOMEWHAT MISLEADING. A WILDCAT STRIKE OF AT LEAST 150 WORKERS IN LINDEN IN PROTEST OVER THE DISCIPLINARY ACTION BY MANAGEMENT AGAINST ONE WORKER HAS SHUT DOWN THE ALUMINA PLANT FROM MAY 26 THROUGH MAY 31. IN ADDITION, THE OPPOSITION IS PLANNING TO HOLD A NUMBER OF MASS DEMONSTRATIONS BEGINNING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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JUNE 1 IN THE WEEKS LEADING UP TO THE REFERENDUM. TO PREVENT ATTEMPTS BY PNC SYMPATHIZERS TO BREAK UP THE RALLIES BY VIOLENCE, AS HAPPENED TWO WEEKS AGO, OPPOSITION GROUPS ARE SAID TO BE RECRUITING THEIR OWN CORPS OF BODYGUARDS.
BURKE

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